

Mr. Poéti speaks out about VIA Rail

Gilles Gagné

NEW CARLISLE: – Quebec Transport Minister Robert Poéti says, “the numbers are not there” to bring VIA Rail back along the south side of the Gaspé Coast.

He was questioned after the announcement of the Quebec government’s intent to buy the Matapédia to Gaspé line. The current plan is to operate the line for freight between Matapédia and Caplan, and the Amiral Tourist Train between Gaspé and Percé.

The most likely option in the medium term would be to restore the VIA Rail service to New Carlisle. This would require repairing two bridges east of Caplan. This option would be considering the repairs required on some bridges mainly in Port Daniel and Grand River.

Minister Poéti finished the March 2 question period by stating, “the numbers



Photo: G. Gagné

VIA Passenger train

are not there,” to bring back VIA Rail. He didn’t comment further.

The next day when the region’s road budget for 2015-2017 was presented, he said that the dormant state of the

Caplan to Percé stretch of line did not mean that it would eventually be dismantled and that he hoped to never dismantle it.

Two hours prior to that statement, while talking to the

members of the Baie des Chaleurs Chamber of Commerce, he said that he was open to receiving private initiatives for the line.

Then, using a lighter tone, he talked about the possibility of bringing a passenger train back to the area, from Gaspé to Matapédia. “It would not have a capacity of 70 passengers,” implying that it would be too large for the region, “but 20, 30 or 40 would be enough.”

Minister Poéti is apparently not aware that the VIA Rail train servicing the Gaspé Peninsula used to carry between 24,000 and 29,000 passengers yearly when it was travelling to Gaspé.

Considering that the train made 156 round trips per year, it means that on the average, the train carried between 155 and 185 passengers per round trip, or between 78 and 92 people each way. These numbers were obtained despite the dete-

rioration of VIA Rail’s service, mainly from 1998 on.

Gaspésie Railway Society President Éric Dubé, says that convincing the Quebec government to invest in order to bring back VIA Rail “reverts to us. We can’t solve all the problems at once.”

Bernard Drainville, one of the Parti québécois leadership candidates, was in the Gaspé on March 4 and 5. When questioned about what he thinks of the current situation regarding transportation on the Gaspé Peninsula, he replied that “it is very important that the government tells us what it intends to do to upgrade the railway. Will there be investments in order to bring back the passenger train? Considering the Orléans Express bus service reduction, the return of the train is a must. There are solutions, even if we have to spread them out over time. It would already be a huge step forward.”